



SENATOR

Debbie Regala

E-Newsletter - 27th District, Tacoma

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27th Legislative District

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A full house at the 27th District Town Hall Meeting at Salishan (3/14/09)

Dear Friends,

I want to express my sincere appreciation to those who made the effort to attend the March 14th town hall meeting at Salishan — and to those who attended the legislative forum hosted by the News Tribune last Thursday. During these difficult economic times, it is more important than ever for us to come together as a community to talk with each other and share our ideas about how to face the challenges ahead.

Last Thursday, the state's Revenue Forecast Council released the new projection of tax revenues. As expected, with the national economy's continuing instability, our projected tax collections will continue to drop over the next 28 months, widening the operating budget gap to \$9 billion.

Data suggests economic growth will remain stagnant into the first six months of 2010. Washington's unemployment rate jumped to 8.4 % in February (9.5% in Pierce County) and unfortunately, job losses are expected to continue even after the economy begins its recovery. This continuing economic instability for so many in our community will have a profound effect on the state's operating budget which derives 52% of its revenues from sales taxes.

Senate budget writers will be forced to implement many of the cuts in Gov. Gregoire's proposed budget and then cut more than 60% deeper. Virtually every functional area of the budget that

legally can be cut, will be cut — some right to the bone. That means cuts in those areas of education not defined as basic education, cuts to higher education, cuts to health care, and cuts to services for the vulnerable. This is heart breaking for me, as it will be for so many in our community, but we must balance our budget. The Senate's 'all-cuts' budget will likely be revealed around the same time as the House releases their budget.

Some people have proposed we raise taxes to avoid cutting so deeply but we cannot write a budget based on revenue that is not secured. Any proposal to raise taxes statewide will need to go to a vote of the people.


This week, the Senate will also unveil a transportation budget (which is separate from the operating budget). The revenue for the transportation budget comes from gas taxes and federal funds which are constitutionally restricted from being used for the operating budget. The transportation budget will focus on priority projects to enhance safety and efficiency on our state highways, and will provide a stimulus for our economy. Our district will be receiving federal funds to add HOV lanes on I-5 in the Fife area.

As in every crisis, there is also opportunity — and this one is no different. State agencies and contractors are re-examining how they deliver services and are proposing solutions which will increase efficiency and reduce costs. These ideas will serve us well both in the short-term and in the future.

Every day I am hearing from people with widely varying perspectives on the budget. I believe this can also be used to our advantage. Constructive dialogue and innovative ideas about how to handle this crisis and work toward a better future are the essence of a representative democracy.

I would like to hear from those folks who were unable to speak at either community event. *How would you propose to save the programs and services you care most about?* The 27th District is a community of diverse individuals with diverse needs. *Which needs would you define as part of the 'common good' and how do we meet those needs?*

As always I thank you for the opportunity to represent you,



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